

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

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INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15
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R 010151Z AUG 78
FM AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6956
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
AMEMBASSY JAKARTA
AMEMBASSY MANILA
AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE
CINCPAC HONOLULU HI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 KUALA LUMPUR 7952

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E. O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT,MY
SUBJ: NEW MALAYSIAN CABINET NAMED

REF: A) KUALA LUMPUR 7501 DTG 240721Z JUL 78, B) KUALA
LUMPUR 7400 DTG 210212Z JUL 78, C) KUALA LUMPUR 0141
DTG 060900Z JAN 78

1. SUMMARY. PRIME MINISTER HUSSEIN ONN NAMED HIS
NEW CABINET JULY 27. AMONG THE MINISTERS THERE WERE
ONLY MINOR CHANGES, THE MOST IMPORTANT (TO THE USG)
BEING THE SWITCH OF DATUK AMAR TAIB MAHMUD FROM
PRIMARY INDUSTRIES TO DEFENSE AND HIS REPLACEMENT BY HIS FORMER
DEPUTY PAUL LEONG. OTHER APPOINTMENTS PROVIDE CLUES TO FUTURE
POLITICAL TRENDS, ESPECIALLY IN SABAH AND SARAWAK. END SUMMARY.

THIS IS THE LINE-UP OF MINISTERS IN THE NEW CABINET.THE MINISTER'S
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PARTY AFFILIATION IS GIVEN,NEW MINISTERS ARE NOTED AND THE OLD JOBS
ARE CITED FOR MINISTERS WITH NEW PORTFOLIOS.
PRIME MINISTER: DATUK HUSSEIN ONN (UMNO)
DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER: DATUK SERI DR. MAHATHIR MOHAMED (UMNO)
MINISTER WITHOUT PORTFOLIO: DATUK HAJI MOHAMED BIN NASIR (BERJASA
FORMERLY PUBLIC ENTERPRISES)
FEDERAL TERRITORY: DATUK HUSSEIN ONN (NEW MINISTRY)

TRADE AND INDUSTRY: DATUK SERI DR. MAHATHIR MOHAMED
WORKS AND PUBLIC UTILITIES: DATUK LEE SAN CHOON
(MCA) (FORMERLY LABOR AND MANPOWER)
TRANSPORT: TAN SRI V. MANICKAVASAGAM (MIC)
(NEW MINISTRY; FORMERLY COMMUNICATIONS)
LAW: DATUK SERI HAMZAH ABU SAMAH (UMNO)
SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENT: TAN SRI ONG
KEE HUI (SUPP)
HOME AFFAIRS: TAN SRI GHAZALI SHAFIE (UMNO)
LAND AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT: TAN SRI ABDUL
KADIR YUSOF (UMNO)
WELFARE SERVICES: DATIN PADUKA HAJJAH AISHAH
GHANI (UMNO)
DEFENSE: DATUK AMAR HAJI TAIB MAHMUD (PBB)
(FORMERLY PRIMARY INDUSTRIES)
FOREIGN AFFAIRS: TENGKU AHMAD RITHAUDDEEN (UMNO)
HOUSING AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT: DATUK MICHAEL CHEN
(MCA) (NEW MINISTRY; LOCAL GOVERNMENT ADDED)
EDUCATION: DATUK MUSA HITAM (UMNO)
FINANCE: TENGKU RAZALEIGH HAMZAH (UMNO)
CULTURE, YOUTH AND SPORTS: DATUK ABDUL SAMAD IDRIS
(UMNO)
HEALTH: TAN SRI CHONG HONG NYAN (MCA)
AGRICULTURE: DATUK SHARIFF AHMAD (UMNO)
INFORMATION: DATUK MOHAMED RAHMAT (UMNO)
LABOR AND MANPOWER: RICHARD HO (MCA) (FORMERLY
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MINISTER WITHOUT PORTFOLIO)
PRIMARY INDUSTRIES: PAUL LEONG (GERAKAN) (FORMERLY
DEPUTY MINISTER OF PRIMARY INDUSTRIES)
PUBLIC ENTERPRISE: ABDUL MANAN OTHMAN (UMNO)
(FORMERLY DEPUTY MINISTER OF TRADE AND INDUSTRY)
ENERGY, TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND POSTS: LEO MOGGIE
(SNAP) (NEW MINISTRY; FORMERLY SARAWAK STATE MINISTER)

3. THESE ARE THE DEPUTY MINISTERS. PARTY AFFILIATIONS ARE NOTED BUT
THE OLD JOBS ARE NOT GIVEN.

PRIME MINISTER'S DEPARTMENT: DATUK SERI HAJI
KAMARUDDIN BIN HOHD. ISA (UMNO)
TRADE AND INDUSTRY: DATUK LIEW SIP HON (MCA)
WORKS AND PUBLIC UTILITIES: DR. NIK HUSSEIN BIN
ABDUL RAHMAN (UMNO)
TRANSPORT: DR. GOH CHENG TEIK (GERAKAN) AND
ALI SHARIFF (UMNO)
LAW: DATUK ABDULLAH BIN ABDUL RAHMAN (UMNO)
SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENT: CLARENCE
MANSUL (BERJAYA)
HOME AFFAIRS: DATUK SERI SYED AHMAD SHAHABUDDIN
(UMNO)

LAND AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT: SANSUI JUNID (UMNO)
DEFENSE: DATUK MOKHTAR HASHMI (UMNO)
HOUSING AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT: DATUK HAJI RAMLI
OMAR (UMNO) AND SAMY VELLU (MIC)
EDUCATION: DATUK CHAN SIANG SUN (MCA) AND HAJI
SALLEH JAFARUDDIN (PBB)
FINANCE: DR. NEO YEE PAN (MCA) AND RAFIDAH AZIZ (UMNO)
CULTURE, YOUTH AND SPORTS: MAK HON KAM (MCA)
HEALTH: DR. SULAIMAN DAUD (PBB)
AGRICULTURE: EDMUND LANGGU (SNAP) AND HAJI ZAKARIA
ABDUL RAHMAN (UMNO)
INFORMATION: DR. LING LIONG SIK (MCA)
LABOR MANPOWER: K. PATHMANABAN (MIC)
ENERGY, TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND POSTS: DATUK NAJIB
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BIN TUN HAJI ABDUL RAZAK (UMNO)

4. THESE ARE THE NEW PARILAMENTARY SECRETARIES,
WITH PARTY AFFILIATIONS NOTED.
PRIME MINISTER'S DEPARTMENT: SHAHRIR BIN ABDUL
SAMAD(UMNO)
FEDERAL TERRITORY: ABDULLAH HAJI AHMAD (UMNO)
TRADE AND INDUSTRY: ABU HASSAN HAJI OMAR (UMNO)
WORKS AND PUBLIC UTILITIES: WILLIAM LYE (BERJAYA)
SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENT: LAW HIENG DING (SUPP)
WELFARE SERVICES: PATRICKANAK UREN (SNAP)
DEFENSE: DATUK ABDUL JALAL BIN HAJI ABU BAKAR (UMNO)
CULTURE, YOUTH AND SPORTS: LUHAT WAN (SNAP)
HEALTH: JAWAN ANAK EMPALING (SUPP)
INFORMATION:DATUK HAJI EMBONG YAHYA (UMNO)
PRIMARY INDUSTRIES: ABDUL RAHIM BIN DATUK THAMBY CHIK (UMNO)
PUBLIC ENTERPRISES: IDRIS BIN ABDUL RAUF (UMNO)

5. THE CHANGES AMONG THE FULL MINISTERS WERE MINIMAL.
(PM HUSSEIN MADE MORE SIGNIICANT CHANGES LAST JANUARY 1--SEE REFTEL
C). THE CHANGE OF MOST DIRECT

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CINCPAC HONOLULU HI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 KUALA LUMPUR 7952

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

INTEREST TO THE USG IS THE SHIFT OF TAIB MAHMUD
FROM PRIMARY INDUSTRIES TO DEFENSE AND HIS REPLACE-
MENT BY HIS FORMER DEPUTY PAUL LEONG. WE HAVE DEALT
WITH BOTH MEN ON TIN, RUBBER AND PALM OIL AND ARE
GRATIFIED TO SEE SOMEONE AS KNOWLEDGEABLE AND
PRAGMATIC AS PAUL LEONG TAKE ON THE PRIMARY
INDUSTRIES PORTFOLIO. HOWEVER, WE HAVE SOMETIMES
FOUND LEONG TO BE A BIT MORE PRICKLY AND NATIONALISTIC
THAN TAIB. THUS HIS SOLID GROUNDING IN THE
MINISTRY COMBINED WITH THE FUNDAMENTAL DIVERGENCE
IN INTERESTS BETWEEN THE US AND MALAYSIA ON SOME
COMMODITY ISSUES SHOULD PROVE CHALLENGING. LEONG
HAS ALREADY EXPRESSED HIS INTENTION TO RAISE THE
QUESTION OF TIN TAXES WITH THE FINANCE
MINISTER AND HAS, IN THE PAST, SHOWN AN ACTIVIST
APPROACH TO TIN PROBLEMS BEFITTING A CHINESE
POLITICIAN FROM A STATE WHERE CHINESE GRAVEL PUMP
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MINERS ARE ENCOUNTERING SEVERE DIFFICULTIES.

6. TAIB'S SHIFT TO DEFENSE, WHICH WAS HELD BY
PM HUSSEIN UNTIL NOW, IS ALSO INTERESTING IN
ITSELF. THE MALAY PRESS HAS CARRIED A CURRENT
RUMOR THAT SARAWAK CHIEF MINISTER RAHMAN YAAKUB
WILL BECOME MINISTER OF DEFENSE AS SOON AS TAIB
MAHMUD CAN WIN A SEAT IN THE SARAWAK STATE ASSEMBLY
AND BECOME THE NEW CHIEF MINISTER. TAIB'S NEW
CABINET APPOINTMENT MAY THEREFORE BE JUST A HOLDING
ACTION PRESAGING SARAWAK STATE ELECTIONS IN THE
NEAR FUTURE (PERHAPS AFTER THE END OF THE FASTING

MONTH IN SEPTEMBER). SHIFTING RAHMAN TO KUALA LUMPUR WOULD BE ONE WAY HUSSEIN COULD DEAL WITH RAHMAN'S FROWING UNPOPULARITY IN SARAWAK (REFTEL A).

7. THE CREATION OF A NEW MINISTRY JUST FOR THE FEDERAL TERRITORY AND HUSSEIN'S ASSUMPTION OF THE PORTFOLIO REFLECTS THE CONCERN WITHIN IN THE NATIONAL FRONT (NF) FOR ITS BAD IMAGE AND POOR SHOWING IN KUALA LUMPUR IN THE RECENT ELECTION. THE NF WON TWO OF THE FIVE SEATS, BUT IT ONLY GAINED A PLURALITY IN ONE (KEPONG) AND ALL THE OPPONENTS OF THE UMNO CANDIDATE WERE DISQUALIFIED IN THE OTHER (PREDOMINANTLY MALAY-SETAPAK). THIS ALSO REFLECTS A DESIRE TO DO SOMETHING TO CHECK THE RISING POPULARITY OF THE OPPOSITION DEMOCRATIC ACTION PARTY (DAP) IN PREDOMINANTLY CHINESE URBAN AREA.

8. MCA PRESIDENT LEE SAN CHOON'S MOVE TO WORKS AND UTILITIES WAS ONLY A PARALLEL SHIFT AT BEST AND THIS REFLECTS RUMORS OF SCANDAL (INVOLVING CONFIDENTIAL

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CORRUPTION) WHICH HAVE BEEN DOGGING HIM IN RECENT WEEKS. (HUSSEIN WOULD HAVE HAD DIFFICULTY DROPPING THE MCA PRESIDENT BEFORE MCA ITSELF DROPPED HIM. SAN CHOON HAS BEEN HURT BY THE SCANDAL AND BY THE MCA'S POOR SHOWING IN THE ELECTION, AND CONSEQUENTLY HE MAY WELL BE VOTED OUT OF OFFICE IN THE MCA ELECTIONS NEXT YEAR.)

9. THE THREE NEWCOMERS TO THE CABINET, PAUL LEONG, MANAN OTHMAN AND LEO MOGGIE, ARE CONSIDERED AMONG THE BRIGHTEST YOUNG POLITICIANS IN THEIR PARTIES AND ALL ARE NOW MARKED FOR IMPORTANT FUTURE ROLES. LIKEWISE, A NUMBER OF YOUNG RISING STARS HAVE BEEN NAMED AS DEPUTY MINISTERS AND PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARIES. AMONG THE MOST PROMISING NEWCOMERS ARE NIK HUSSEIN ABDUL RAHMAN, SANUSI JUNID, SAMY VELLU, MAK HON KAM, SHAHRIR ABDUL SAMAD, ABDULLAH AHMAD (NO KIN TO THE FORMER DEPUTY MINISTER NOW UNDER DETENTION), RAHMIN THAMBY CHIK (AN UMNO YOUTH SUPPORTER OF THE NOW JAILED FORMER SELANGOR CHIEF MINISTER HARUN IDRIS) AND IDRIS RAUF. PERHAPS MORE SYMBOLIC THAN SUBSTANTIVE IS THE APPOINTMENT OF NAJIB ABDUL RAZAK (THE SON OF TUN RAZAK) AS DEPUTY MINISTER.

10. THERE IS ALSO SIGNIFICANCE IN SOME THINGS

THAT DID NOT HAPPEN. AFTER THE DEFEAT OF FORMER WORKS AND UTILITIES MINISTER GHANI GILONG, NO UNITED SABAH NATIONAL ORGANIZATION (USNO) MP HAS RECEIVED A GOVERNMENT POST. FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE JOINING THE NATIONAL FRONT SABAH'S BERJAYA PARTY IS REPRESENTED IN KUALA LUMPUR, BUT ONLY BY LESSER PERSONALITIES IN MINOR POSTS. IN FACT, FOR THE FIRST TIME IN YEARS SABAH HAS NO FULL MINISTER (SARAWAK NOW HAS THREE), AND THIS

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NEGLECT OF SABAH'S INTERESTS MAY WELL REFLECT PM HUSSEIN'S DISSATISFACTION WITH THE POLITICAL SITUATION IN THE STATE WHERE THE RIVALRY BETWEEN USNO AND BERJAYA PLAYED A MAJOR ROLE IN THE RECENT ELECTION DESPITE THE MOMINAL MEMBERSHIP OF BOTH IN THE NF.

11. FORMER MINISTER OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND FEDERAL TERRITORY HASSAN ADLI, WAS DROPPED FROM THE GOVERNMENT, AND FORMER PUBLIC ENTERPRISES MINISTER MOHAMED NASIR WAS GIVEN A TOKEN POSITION AS MINISTER WITHOUT PORTFOLIO. BOTH MEN WERE ASSOCIATED WITH THE NEW BERJASA PARTY WHICH HELPED DEFEAT THE ISLAMIC PARTY (PAS) IN KELANTAN STATE ELECTION LAST MARCH AND THEIR DEMOTIONS MAKE IT CLEAR THAT UMNO HAS LITTLE NEED FOR BERJASA NOW THAT PAS HAS BEEN HUMBLLED.

12. ALTHOUGH THE CUMULATIVE CHANGES IN THE GOVERNMENT SINCE HUSSEIN ONN BECAME PRIME MINISTER ARE NOW SIGNIFICANT, ESPECIALLY IN THE PORTFOLIO ASSIGNMENTS AND THE ADDITION OF NEW YOUNG DEPUTY MINISTERS AND PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARIES, THE CABINET IS STILL VERY MUCH THE ONE HUSSEIN INHERITED. (ONLY THREE OF THE CURRENT MINISTERS WERE NOT EITHER MINISTERS OR DEPUTY MINISTERS IN THE GOVERNMENT TUN RAZAK FORMED IN 1974.) THE PRIME MINISTER HAS NOT MADE THE WHOLESAL HOUSECLEANING WE HAVE BEEN EXPECTING, BUT HAS CHOSEN TO STRENGTHEN THE GOVERNMENT BY ENLARGING IT AND ADDING NEW FACES WHILE RETAINING MOST OF THE OLD ONES. WE EXPECT HOWEVER TO SEE ADDITIONAL ADJUSTMENTS TO THE CABINET WITHIN THE NEXT FEW MONTHS, PARTICULARLY

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AFTER THE UMNO GENERAL ASSEMBLY, INCLUDING
REALIGNMENT OF SOME OF THE DEPUTY MINISTER SLOTS
(THE NEWLY CREATED TRANSPORT MINISTRY NOW HAS TWO
DEPUTIES;THE IMPORTANT PRIMARY INDUSTRIES MINISTRY
HAS NONE).
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